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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001826

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SUBJECT: MOFAT EQUIVOCAL ABOUT CONTINUING THE ROK PRESENCE
IN AFGHANISTAN BEYOND 2007

Classified By: A/POL Brian D. McFeeters. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a June 7 meeting, DoS and OSD representatives presented the ROKG with a proposed course of action for the ROK's continued presence in Afghanistan beyond ¶2007. In response, Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs (MOFAT) North America III Division Director Lee Jeong-kyu acknowledged that the ROK would like to assist in Afghanistan's security and development, and expressed that the ROKG had been examining possible ways for it to continue in Afghanistan. However, the ROKG was very cautious regarding the U.S. suggestions. Lee stressed that the security situation in Afghanistan would be a determining factor in the ROK's continued presence. Furthermore, any additional ROK troop deployment would be extremely difficult to achieve given the legislated demand by the National Assembly for a troop withdrawal by the end of 2007. Lee said that ROK participation in a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was a good possibility, but that the ROKG would prefer to work with the United States rather than NATO. Lee expressed more support for continued non-military assistance, including expanded Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) aid projects and efforts to improve Korean private sector development in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Proposal for a Continued ROK Presence

¶2. (C) On June 7, an interagency U.S. team presented ROKG officials from MOFAT, the Ministry of National Defense (MND), Blue House (Presidential staff), and the ROK JCS with the U.S. "Proposal for Continuing the ROK Presence in Afghanistan Beyond 2007." Recognizing the ROK's valuable contributions to date and the ROK National Assembly's call for the complete withdrawal of ROK troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2007, USG officials noted that much more remains to be done to assist in the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. USG officials called for the ROKG to continue its military presence, participate in the UN-mandated NATO/International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and expand the geographical range of their assistance activities to meet needs outside of Kabul.

¶3. (C) DoS ROK Unit Chief Andrew Hyde praised the current ROK efforts and outlined the five "pillars" of the U.S. proposal for how the ROK could continue to contribute to the mission in Afghanistan, asking that the ROK:

- Maintain and expand existing KOICA programs
- Continue operations of its Medical Clinic at Bagram Air Force Base and consider expanding medical services outside of Kabul
- Take a lead role in a PRT (working with NATO)
- Train and equip Afghan Forces
- Further encourage Korean business investment in Afghanistan

Hyde requested that the ROKG provide a response on the proposed future ROK presence in Afghanistan as soon as possible. He also suggested that the ROKG meet with NATO headquarters staff in Brussels to learn more about leading a PRT and consider sending an assessment team to Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) MOFAT's Lee Jeong-kyu responded that the ROK is committed to assisting in the stabilization and rebuilding of Afghanistan. Lee emphasized that the security of ROK personnel remains of paramount concern for the ROKG. Regarding the U.S. proposal, Lee said that ROK troops in Afghanistan would have to be withdrawn by the end of 2007 in accordance with the National Assembly's mandate, but that the ROKG was examining how it could continue to contribute to Afghanistan. Lee also noted that maintaining a ROK troop presence, or deploying new ROK troops, would be very difficult to get through the National Assembly.

KOICA

¶5. (C) Lee stressed that Foreign Minister Song Min-soon had recently reaffirmed the ROK's commitment to assisting in Afghanistan through KOICA. To date, KOICA has focused on the construction of much-needed schools, hospitals, power plants, and rural development projects, Lee said. KOICA's programs in Afghanistan would continue to expand, but Lee stressed that the scope and location of its future activities would be heavily dependent on the security situation in Afghanistan.

Provincial Reconstruction Team

¶6. (C) Lee said that the ROKG was giving serious consideration to leading a PRT, stating that he "can't guarantee anything, but it is moving in a positive direction." However, Lee expressed several concerns about a ROK led PRT. As with other aspects of continued ROK involvement in Afghanistan, Lee said the security situation would heavily influence the ROKG decision to lead or participate in a PRT. As a result, Lee stressed that considerable support would be needed to safeguard the civilian ROK staff if the ROK were to lead a PRT. Lee also pointed out that the U.S. (and ISAF) preferred PRT location of Dai Kunde province was very isolated, noting that it was one of only two provinces yet to receive a PRT and that it was "perhaps better suited to a country with experience in leading a PRT." Consequently, Lee explained that the ROKG would prefer to work with the U.S. on a PRT in another location, perhaps Parwan, where the U.S. military could provide security for Korean nationals. Lee added that the ROKG preferred to work directly with the United States rather than establish a PRT under NATO's leadership, due to difficulties the ROKG had already encountered with NATO's bureaucracy in trying to gain ISAF membership.

¶7. (C) Hyde responded that it would be feasible for the ROKG to work with another country on a PRT operation, but it was disappointing that the ROKG wanted to work exclusively with the United States, highlighting that many other countries were working successfully with NATO in Afghanistan. Hyde added that the U.S. expectation was that the ROKG would

request the National Assembly authorize sending troops to assist in providing security for the ROK PRT. Hyde noted that while the National Assembly mandated that the current deployment return to the ROK at the end of 2007, this did not prevent the ROKG from considering a new deployment in 2008. Lee dismissed the suggestion, saying that "it would be difficult to propose sending troops to the very country that we had to pull them out of."

¶ 8. (C) Hyde and OSD's Morgan noted that they could understand the ROKG's apprehension about navigating the NATO bureaucracy and offered continued and constant U.S. support throughout the process. However, Hyde emphasized that "this is about the Korean role in Afghanistan and in the international community. We do not want you to limit yourselves to looking exclusively at PRTs partnered with the U.S."

Training and Equipping Afghan Forces

¶ 9. (C) In response to the request to assist in "building an Afghani army from scratch," ROK JCS Overseas Development Branch Chief Colonel Kim Young-shik explained that the ROK military was "exploring feasible ways to keep troops in Afghanistan," but faced constraints in terms of both the National Assembly's mandate on troop withdrawal and a limited availability of resources due to the North Korean threat. Deploying ROK troops to train and equip Afghan forces would be difficult, he said. During the meeting it appeared that there was some confusion on the ROK side. In a subsequent discussion with Kim after the meeting, LTC

Finnegan clarified the USG position in this area, which resulted in Kim acknowledging that he misunderstood the initial request and that he would further consider the idea, leaving the door open for further discussion.

Korean Business Investment

¶ 10. (C) According to Lee, current Korean contracts in Afghanistan totaled approximately USD 270 million. The ROKG hoped to see an expanded Korean business presence in Afghanistan, Lee said, while again cautioning that this expansion would be tied to improved security in the country. Lee requested the United States share any information available about how the USG or U.S. companies identify ways to promote U.S. investment in Afghanistan. OSD's Morgan noted that such a program was in operation in the United States and offered to provide the information at a later date.

PARTICIPANTS

¶ 11. (U) List of Participants

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Mr. David Wolff, Pol-Mil Chief, DoS/American Embassy Seoul
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